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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3372  
INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0713  
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0812  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5443  
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 0744  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8941  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9031  
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0544  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2222  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9652  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1470  
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0928  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4518  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 8808  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 9113  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 6915  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 3637  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 8273  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4216  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 6237  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000910

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: UTTARAKHAND: SLIM MARGIN MAY DETERMINE ELECTION  
OUTCOME

REF: NEW DELHI 000659

11. (SBU) Summary: On February 21st, an estimated 55-60% of Uttarakhand's 6 million member electorate voted in the second Legislative Assembly election since the state was created out of Uttar Pradesh in 2000 (reftel). The main battle was between the BJP and Congress for sixty-nine assembly seats and one Lok Sabha seat. Polls for one assembly were delayed due to the death of its Congress party candidate. Polling was peaceful, despite some hiccups with a few electronic voting machines and some names missing from voter lists. State Congress leader and incumbent Chief Minister N D Tiwari did not run for a seat, leaving the party without a clear chief ministerial candidate, potentially hurting Congress's chances to hold on to the state. The election commission will report the results on February 27th, along with those of Punjab and Manipur. End Summary.

Exit Polls Unreliable  
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12. (SBU) Although most exit polls gave a clear, but slim, victory to the BJP, an NDTV poll predicted a tie. In such a tight race, exit polls (always of questionable value in India) cannot provide a reliable indicator of the outcome. According to the HT/CNN-IBN poll, the BJP can expect to garner about 34% of the votes for an estimated 33-39 seats, with Congress receiving an estimated 31%, gaining between 21-27 seats. Such an outcome would be a reversal of the 2002 elections, in which Congress won 36 seats and the BJP 19,

with the remainder going to various regional parties and independents. Despite the wide variance in seats, the electoral divide between the BJP and Congress in that race was just over one percent. The NDTV poll suggests, however, that the ruling Congress and opposition BJP are both set to get 25-35 seats in the 70-member assembly. In such a "hung assembly," the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD), would likely break the deadlock by joining with Congress to form the government.

#### Congress Hurt by Lack of Leadership

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¶3. (SBU) Comment: In Indian state politics, it is usually an uphill battle for the incumbent to hold on to power. That is even more so in the case of Uttarakhand, where regional parties are ineffectual and politics are dominated by Congress and the BJP. This "anti-incumbency factor" is further compounded by the retirement of Chief Minister and Congress party "grand old man" N. D. Tiwari. Initially, his failure to run for a legislative assembly seat in this election opened him up to accusations of "cowardice" from the BJP. In the final days of the campaign, Tiwari declared publicly that he will not serve as Chief Minister again. Although Tiwari gives his age (82) and his indifferent health as reasons for retiring, the Hindustan Times cited Congress party sources as saying that Tiwari hopes to succeed A. P. J. Abdul Kalam as President of India when Kalam's term ends later this year. Based on previous PolOff meetings with him, Tiwari seems to have tired of running a small state and wants to return to the national political stage where he is more at

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home. Tiwari's departure has provided the BJP with a political Godsend, as its own popular--and much younger at 65--former Chief Minister, Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, is fully set to take up the Chief Minister's mantle.

¶4. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:  
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)  
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